

Rainbow Reveille

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River
Street

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Soldiers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, unload from a patrol boat on the Tigris River to clear an island of possible weapons caches and insurgents during Operation River Street March 26. (Photo by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr./1st BCT Public Affairs)





Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, watch as a OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopter banks hard over their position on the banks of the Tigris River. The helicopter was providing reconnaissance during Operation River Street March 26. (Photo by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr./1st BCT Public Affairs)

Reveille Staff

Task Force Liberty Commander

Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Taluto

Task Force Liberty CSM

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Fearnside

Task Force Liberty PAO

Maj. Richard Goldenberg

Managing Editor

Staff Sgt. Robert Timmons

Editor

Sgt. Jennifer J. Eidson

Distribution Manager

Sgt. 1st Class Dean Welch

Contributors

42nd Infantry Division PAO

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

55th Signal Det. (Combat Camera)

1st Brigade Combat Team PAO

3rd Brigade Combat Team PAO

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Iraqi self-defense a top priority

Our first quarter here in North Central Iraq continues to show tremendous progress. Our partnership with Iraqi Security Forces is achieving success across our area of operations.

Task Force Liberty continues to implement our Military Transition Teams within the Iraqi army. As Iraqi forces assume more and more operations against the terrorists and criminals who seek to undermine the new Iraqi government, our Task Force Liberty Soldiers will enhance that partnership with effective firepower and support.

Soldiers operating in these teams will be the link between Iraqi forces and all the assets and capabilities of our task force. They will assist in the growth of the Iraqi army throughout North Central Iraq.

Our goal is to assist in the development of an independent and self-sustaining Iraqi army. As Iraqi soldiers' capabilities continue to grow, so too will their responsibility and lead role in defeating the insurgency.



Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Taluto

Our role this year is a transitional one. Our mission remains the security of the democratic process here in North Central Iraq as the Iraqi police and army begin their role as lead elements in the fight against terrorism here.

That will require us to stay focused on the fight as we prepare our Iraqi partners to advance to the front. We already see the benefits of our joint patrols and joint raids. Over time, more and more of these missions will be led or executed independently by Iraqi forces.

The insurgent playbook is a losing one. The people of Iraq see the progress made each day. It is evident in our strong team partnership and the commitment of the Iraqi government and security forces to restore peace and prosperity to their people.

Together, we will continue to diminish the enemy's ability to spread violence and intimidation throughout AO Liberty. NEVER FORGET!

Liberty 6

Fight complacency with discipline

Complacency is a word I sometimes hear being tossed around by Task Force Liberty Soldiers, especially when we talk about safety. Are we sure we know the meaning of the word or even use the word correctly?

Complacency is defined by Webster's as: "Self satisfied, usually in an unreflective way and without being aware of possible dangers."

Breaking this down for Task Force Liberty, it means that you are so confident in your patrol or execution of your duty that you think you know everything you need to know and that there is no chance for the enemy to get a vote. Keep in mind that sometimes that enemy is accidents.

As Task Force Liberty Soldiers we must understand that whatever the mission is, no matter how many times it was accomplished without incident or trouble, it does not guarantee it will always be done safely. As the days go by and the temperature rises, it's very easy to start skipping important steps or procedures because "I've done it 100 times before," or "It's too hot." No matter the excuse, the result can mean serious harm to your-



Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Fearnside

self and others.

How do we fight complacency?

We fight complacency with discipline. Discipline in doing the right things, the right way, every time. Conducting troop leading procedures, pre-combat checks and inspections are all ways to maintain discipline and fight complacency. All Soldiers are required to prepare themselves and their equipment prior to conducting every mission. Leaders consistently conduct inspections and rehearsals. If either one is neglected than it's just a matter of time before you run into trouble. Disciplined Soldiers don't let that happen!

Before you go out on your next mission, or report to your assigned duty, answer these two questions:

1. What have I done to improve the discipline of myself and my unit today?
2. What have I done to better prepare myself and unit for the mission?

THIS IS HOW WE FIGHT COMPLACENCY!

Liberty 7

NEVER Forget

LIBERTY

Soldiers from the 278th Regimental Combat Team gathered for a Charlie Daniels Band concert April 12, at Forward Operating Base Caldwell, Iraq. Charlie Daniels personally thanked the troops for serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and for the sacrifices they have made. At the concert the band played its hit "Devil went down to Georgia."



Devil went down to Caldwell

Charlie Daniels Band visits Task Force Liberty troops

Photos by Sgt. Matthew Acosta/22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



The Charlie Daniels Band pumps out one of its many hits during the concert at Forward Operating Base Caldwell.



Soldiers from the 278th Regimental Combat Team stand in line to get autographs from the band.



Charlie Daniels rocks on the guitar during the show.



Air Force Technical Sgt. Troy Moore, Mental Health Technician and EMT instructor, 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron, Task Force Liberty, watches an Iraqi EMT student splint a simulated leg fracture on a medical instruction mannequin during the final practical exercise of the class.

Task Force trains Iraqi medical staff

**Story, photos
by Sgt. Matthew Acosta**
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WARRIOR, Kirkuk, Iraq- A new program has been developed to train Iraqi civilians in the life-saving emergency medical technician skills necessary to help the Iraqi people take charge of their nation.

In a combined effort with the U.S. State Department, Ministry of Health, the Red Crescent and the U.S. Army and Air Force, the first civilian EMT program in Iraq will consist of four individual classes on basic EMT skills.

At Kirkuk Regional Airbase (Forward Operating Base Warrior) medical staff assigned to the Air Force's 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron and the Army's 145th Support Battalion and 126th Forward Surgical Team spearheaded the training of 23 hand-picked Iraqi civilians in their second EMT class at the airbase.

"The purpose of this course has two main goals," said Army Capt. Jeremy Ostermiller, physician assistant and program coordinator,

Company C, 145th Support Battalion, Idaho National Guard, Task Force Liberty. "One (goal) is to teach the basic EMT skills to civilians so they can treat casualties."

Ostermiller said the second goal is to have the three highest graduates from each class return as assistant instructors with the next class. Eventually the entire program will be turned over to them, with the Army and Air Force observing the program for quality control. This would establish the start of an Iraqi-lead EMT training system.

Most of the students do not have medical backgrounds and many of those selected work as security for oil fields and some are firefighters, he added.

During the two-week course, students are taught the same basic lifesaving skills as taught in the nationally registered EMT course, in the United States, including cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, first aid, trauma management, intravenous injections, injury dressings, splinting, joint immobilization and childbirth procedures.

"Normally in the Arab culture, women



Air Force Technical Sgt. Ronald Stacy, functional medic manager and EMT instructor, 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron, Task Force Liberty, watches an Iraqi civilian as he applies a tourniquet to a mannequin.

nurses deliver babies,” Ostermiller said. “But these guys showed interest in learning everything they can, including the procedures for child delivery.”

Besides the cultural difference, the medical staff has had to overcome a few obstacles, he said.

“Because this is the first EMT program taught in Iraq, there are no textbooks written in Arabic available to the students,” Ostermiller said. “We have some slides with both Arabic and English translations on them now describing some procedures which help out a great deal with the language barrier.”

After the training period, the students were given a 100-question written exam and a practical exam consisting of several injury stations.

“The Iraqi students were eager to take the written exam, but were more enthusiastic with taking the hands-on practical exam,” said Senior Airman Melissa Wass, medical technician and instructor, 506th EMEDSS, Task Force Liberty.

“They’re incredible,” she added. “They learned the curriculum in two weeks, versus the normal six-week time frame we teach back in the states.”

“The reason they picked it up so fast is because those with the aptitude for it were specifically identified and chosen to attend the course,” said Technical Sgt. Ronald Stacy, medical technician and instructor, 506th EMEDSS, Task Force Liberty. “They want to learn about the medical field. They want to be here and it shows.”

The entire class of Iraqi EMT students graduated April 2 at Kirkuk Regional Airbase and the three honor graduates were presented with U.S. military combat lifesaver medical kits as a reward. They were also invited back to become assistant instructors in the next EMT class.



Air Force Technical Sgt. Ronald Stacy, functional medic manager and EMT instructor, 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron, Task Force Liberty, monitors Iraqi civilians as they apply a tourniquet during the final medical practical exam for EMT certification.

Wass said she enjoyed working with the Iraqis and looks forward to teaching the next class.

“I feel good knowing we’re making a difference with people we normally wouldn’t have been able to help,” Wass said.

“This course can be likened to the saying ‘give a man a fish and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and he’ll feed himself for a lifetime,’” Stacy said. “I think this is the start of something really good for the people. If they grab hold of this EMT program, it’s a step closer to them taking charge of the new medical field that’s growing here in Iraq.”



Two Iraqi students apply a tourniquet to a medical mannequin to simulate one of the many lifesaving skills they learned while attending the first EMT course taught to Iraqi civilians.



patrols hit streets

Story, photos

by Sgt. Matthew Acosta

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE McHENRY, Kirkuk, Iraq- As the war in Iraq continues, Iraqi army soldiers are receiving more responsibilities and additional training by Coalition Soldiers theater-wide.

In Kirkuk, Idaho National Guardsmen assigned to the "Colts" platoon, 1st Battalion, 148th Field Artillery, frequently train Iraqi army soldiers by including them in their patrols when possible.

Although training the Iraqi Army is not their assigned tasking, the "Colts" will allow the Iraqi soldiers to lead joint combat patrols and counter-IED patrols whenever possible.

"Sometimes while out on counter-IED missions or combat patrols, we may stop at an Iraqi army traffic check-point and coordinate a joint patrol with the Iraqi soldiers," said 1st Lt. Chad Knowles, platoon leader. "In doing so we can see what level they're at in their training and how much they have learned."

Knowles said they would let the Iraqi platoon sergeant plan the patrol, vehicle sequence and interval and how he was going to employ the Coalition Soldiers in the patrol.

"Doing this gives them the opportunity to use us as a resource, but lets them start taking charge of the situation and it gets them in the thought process of taking control of patrols," he added.

The Nation Guardsmen routinely patrol the streets around Forward Operating Base McHenry passing through several Iraqi check-points and sometimes stop to assist the Iraqis in searching



Idaho National Guardsmen assigned to 1st Battalion, 148th Field Artillery, Task Force Liberty, search vehicles at a traffic control point in Kirkuk, Iraq.



Iraqi army soldiers conduct a counter-IED search in a joint effort with Idaho National Guard Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 148th Field Artillery.



Sergeant Brent Peterson, field artilleryman, 1st Battalion, 148th Field Artillery, Task Force Liberty, checks the ID of an Iraqi driver at a traffic control point in Kirkuk, Iraq.

vehicles.

"Often we stop at the traffic control points to assist the Iraqi soldiers in searching vehicles and we have seen a difference in the way they operate in just the last three weeks," Knowles said.

"They have absorbed what we have taught them and even the Iraqi people have more respect for the checkpoints and are more patient, knowing it is their job to search the vehicles."

Although the Iraqi soldiers are doing well with taking charge of certain areas of responsibility, they still need training until they are ready to take over operations, said Sgt. Brent Peterson, field artilleryman.

"Training the Iraqis to take over the combat patrols and operations is going to be a long process," Peterson said.

"But I think the fact that they are willing to go out and show they want to be independent makes them feel like they're becoming the force they need to be for their own country," he added.

"It's only a matter of time before the Iraqi people look to the Iraqi army for security," he added.

"We want them to be successful because they will eventually be taking the reigns," Knowles said.



Iraqi army soldiers prepare for a joint counter-IED search and combat patrol with Idaho National Guard Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 148th Field Artillery, Task Force Liberty.

Into the desert

Raiders reconnoiter barren area

Story, photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DAGGER, Tikrit, Iraq - Much of the land west of Bayji and Tikrit, to Lake Thar Thar is open desert. Apart from a few very small villages, the only thing that can be found here is a handful of houses and farms.

Reconnaissance and control of this part of Iraq falls in the Company C, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, area of operation.

"Our mission today (is) to perform a search and attack out in the western desert portion of my company's sector, which is a pretty large area," said Capt. Jason Friedt, company commander. "On a rough guess, I would say it's about the size of the National Training Center in (Fort Irwin, Calif.)"

Both Friedt and Sgt. 1st Class Robert Kloenne, platoon sergeant, said they were there to meet the people residing in this part of the country and gather intelligence on any possible insurgent activity.

"Basically we wanted to come out here to the western desert and look for any (terrorist) activity, and identify any reasons why we may need to patrol out here," Kloenne said.

"We do need to patrol more often," he added. "It's been very good. We've talked to people in a few of the villages beside (Lake Thar Thar), and so far, they've reported that they haven't seen any suspicious activity."

Friedt explained the two reasons for stopping in the towns and talking to the residents there.

"First, it was to introduce the company to the people since we haven't been out here all that much," Friedt said. "Second, we were out here to look for some tactical intelligence. (We wanted) to see if the



Sergeant James Wotherspoon, a gunner for Company C, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, scans the horizon for possible terrorist activity in the desert west of Bayji, near Lake Thar Thar March 29.

people had seen any (anti-Iraqi forces), or any foreign fighters out here training, staging or even just hiding out."

If they had any usable information, Friedt said, the Soldiers would use it to narrow their search to a smaller area.

Kloenne said since they haven't shown a presence in this part of Iraq, it was hard to read how the people felt, but overall he said the people's reaction was positive.

"This is the first time we have been out here, so you can't really tell from past experiences what their reactions are to this (presence patrol)," Kloenne said. "So far it's been a very positive reaction."

Kloenne said that most of the patrol has been cross country in order to stay away from roads and avoid traffic, as the insurgents probably won't have a camp beside a main road and have a tendency to plant (improvised explosive devices) beside the main roads.

"If you spread out ... you're going to be able to cover and see more ground," Friedt said.

Friedt said he felt that most of the people they talked to were pretty glad to see them.

"The fact that someone is actually coming out here, paying attention to them and asking them about their needs and their problems just makes them feel good," Friedt said.

Friedt said this patrol was the first of many the company planned to perform during the deployment. He also said he hoped that with continued friendly presence patrols, the people residing in the area would come to trust the Soldiers and eventually provide them with useful intelligence.



Staff Sgt. Michael Deliberti, a Company C, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment truck commander, gives candy to a child in a small village near Lake Thar Thar.

An Iraqi army soldier from the 203rd Battalion shouts while firing at paper targets with his AK-47 assault rifle at a range in Ad Duluiyah, Iraq.



Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, train Iraqi army soldiers and police at Ad Duluiyah, Iraq.

***Photos by
Spc. Natalie Loacks, 3rd
BCT Public Affairs***

FORWARD OPERATING BASE MACKENZIE, Iraq -The goal of the Soldiers of Task Force 1-15 Infantry is simple: train the Iraqi army company to be able to handle Ad Duluiyah's security.

Task Force 1-15 has been training Iraqi soldiers and police officers at Forward Operating Base Mackenzie for the past few months.

Training the IA



An Iraqi police officer fires his Glock 19 9mm pistol at a paper target. The police officers trained on pistol marksmanship fundamentals at the same ranges used by the 203rd Battalion Iraqi Army, in Ad Duluiyah, Iraq.



Iraqi army soldiers of the 203rd Battalion, provide security, and execute a stack formation at Forward Operating Base Mackenzie, Iraq.



Captain David Stanley, Iraqi Security Force liaison officer, helps an Iraqi police student with his ammunition.



Iraqi trainees shout their platoon slogan on graduation day, April 23. Instructors have been teaching tolerance to the new recruits.

Iraqi classes stress tolerance

**Story, photo
by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta**
42nd Infantry Division Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DAN-GER, Tikrit, Iraq – New Iraqi soldiers begin learning ethnic and religious tolerance as soon as they arrive for basic training at the 4th Iraqi Army Training Academy here.

“As soon as they get off the bus, we gather them together,” said Sgt. Basim Ali Ahmad, an Iraqi army trainer. “We treat them all the same – Kurd, Shia and Sunni. We give the same orders to all, and ensure they follow the orders. This is how they learn to work as a team.”

As in the U.S. military, equal opportunity and tolerance is part of becoming an Iraqi soldier – as basic to their basic training as rifle marksmanship, marching, map reading and first aid.

“Our principle is to make the soldiers understand there is no difference between Sunnis, Shias and Kurds,” Ahmad said. “I make sure my instructors teach that.”

Iraq is 75 percent Arab and 20 percent Kurdish, according to a Central Intelligence Agency fact book on Iraq. Turkomen and

Assyrians comprise the other 5 percent.

Most of the current class is Kurdish. The class is made up of 313 Sunnis and 14 Shias. Class size averages 300 to 350 soldiers. Tolerance among them, said Sgt. 1st Class Chris Sharpe, the senior Coalition Forces drill sergeant at the academy, is bred through their living and working areas.

“We start right from day one,” Sharpe said. “When we assign them to different platoons, we ensure there is an even mixture of Kurdish and Arab soldiers.”

The Iraqi soldiers also receive formal equality and tolerance training in a course called equal opportunity. The course covers fair and equal treatment, and preventing harassment, discrimination, bias and prejudice. Course material includes a photograph of Iraqi children, which academy instructors invite Iraqi trainees to look at to guess the children’s ethnic or religious background – an impossible task which demonstrates the futility of discrimination.

“It’s basically the same class American Soldiers receive,” Sharpe said.

“We cite Saddam Hussein’s regime as a

poor example of ethnic tolerance ... how he favored one group over another,” Ahmad said. “That’s how we solve this problem.”

Tolerance will help solve another problem facing Iraq, Ahmad added – the insurgency.

“We treat [the soldiers] with respect – that’s how they get on the same sheet of music,” he said. “If the soldiers respect people and each other, they will earn respect. This breeds honesty and the people will assist them with information about the insurgents.”

Sgt. Juma’a Mahmod Omar, a trainee at the academy, agreed.

“We came here to learn how to protect the Iraqi people,” he said. “It’s important that they respect us. If we support them, they will support us.”

Most of the current academy class hail from Kirkuk, which Omar said is a good example of Iraq’s diversity. Omar said Christians, Turkomen, Sunnis, and Shias live in Kirkuk – his hometown.

“For me, ethnic diversity is not a challenge,” he said. “I’m used to it. All peoples are the same for me.”



Soldiers from Company A practice static loading a patrol boat they will be using to perform Operation River Street.

2-7 Infantry prepares to get wet

Story, photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, Tikrit, Iraq - Soldiers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, trained for amphibious patrols at Forward Operating Base Danger March 24 in preparation for Operation River Street.

"We are doing island-clearing missions with the Iraqi Army and Coalition Forces," said Staff Sgt. Daniel Deboer, 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company. "The purpose is to clear the islands (along the Tigris River) of weapons caches that the local insurgents may have been using (to attack Coalition Forces) and are now hiding."

Soldiers from 2-7 Infantry are ready to tackle the mission that lies ahead of them, even though this type of mission is very different from anything they have ever done, said Sgt. Dustin Wheeland, team leader.

"What we are doing out here today is training up on how to static load boats that are provided for us by the engineers for this island-hopping mission coming up," Wheeland said. "We are pretty much going to be hopping from island to island, clearing them of any (terrorist) activity."

While many Soldiers from 2-7 Infantry are not used to water-based missions, they are absorbing the training well, Deboer said.

"They are loving the training, it's something



Staff Sgt. Daniel Deboer, a senior boat operator from the 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company, briefs Soldiers from Company A on how to static load a patrol boat.

new," Deboer said. "They're excited, and they want to get out there and accomplish the mission ... get things done. Probably the main challenge is that there are a lot of non-swimmers that are scared of the water. Other than that, everyone else is on top of things and ready to move out."

Deboer has been on missions like this before, and feels his experience has been helpful in preparing the Soldiers for the upcoming missions.

"We have been (preparing) for about a week. A lot of us have experience from being stationed in Tikrit during (Operation Iraqi Freedom) 1. We had a lot of island-clearing missions back then," he said.

Soldiers who participated in the training met with some challenges, but were also confident about accomplishing their mission.

"Some of them are a little afraid of water, we have been able to overcome that fear in the last couple of days with a couple of drown-proofing classes," Wheeland said. "We don't fear the water too much, but the biggest complaint we've had is about getting wet. Everybody likes to stay dry over here,

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but they're sucking it up and driving on.

"For most of us, this is the first time being on a boat," he added. "We're mechanized infantry. We've never dealt too much with amphibious assaults. We run around in Bradleys and humvees mostly. We've never had a call for an amphibious island assault."

One of the challenges the Soldiers faced was boarding the boat with all of their gear, including a life jacket, said Pfc. Allen Black, rifleman.

"It's not easy getting up the front of the boat wearing all this stuff. You kind of need some help."

During OIF I, there were many hurdles to overcome, as most of Deboer's experience with amphibious assault missions had been training exercises and reading manuals, he said. He was able to apply the lessons learned from the first deployment to come up with a set standard. He has been able to pass these standards, such as boat movement formations and unloading procedures; along to the Soldiers he trains for amphibious operations today.

Now that the Soldiers are trained up, all that awaits them is a chance to go out and do what they do best: get the job done.



Staff Sgt. Daniel Deboer, a senior boat operator from the 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company, shows Soldiers from Company A the layout of a patrol boat.



Soldiers from Company A receive instruction on how to static load a patrol boat they will be using to perform Operation River Street.



Specialist Jared Bower, a Company A machine gunner, leaps from a patrol boat during a training exercise to prepare the Soldiers for an upcoming amphibious assault mission. The operation was conducted to clear islands in the Tigris River of insurgents and weapons caches.

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Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, and the 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company cruise down the Tigris River at sunrise to clear islands of insurgents and weapons caches in support of Operation River Street March 26.

Infantry Soldiers conduct river raid

**Story, photos
by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT Public Affairs**

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DAN-GER, Tikrit, Iraq - Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, the 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company and the Iraqi army participated in Operation River Street on the Tigris River March 26.

The purpose of the operation was to clear islands along the Tigris of insurgents and weapons caches, and to limit the amount of space terrorists had to conduct their operations. The operation was a collabora-

tion of air, land and water elements.

"During the first day of Operation River Street, we searched six islands, found approximately 20 (AK47 rifles) and detained one person," said Command Sgt. Maj.

Samuel D. Coston, 2-7 Infantry command sergeant major. "We had information that personnel were using the islands to hide supplies for the insurgents in Samarra, Bayji and in our own area of Tikrit."

Coston said by destroying the weapons and

taking charge of those sites he hoped that the (supply of weapons to the insurgency) would not continue.

"We ran into some pretty thick brush and had to skirt around it, and the mud out here gets pretty deep, but other than that it's gone pretty good."

**- Sgt. Gary Heidrich
Team Leader
2-7 Infantry**



An Iraqi army sergeant passes out life preservers to the members of his squad. The Iraqi soldiers went with Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, and the 502nd Engineer Multi-Role Bridge Company to clear islands on the Tigris River in support of Operation River Street March 26.

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Snipers provide hidden support

Story, photo by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, Tikrit, Iraq - While Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, and the 502nd Engineer Battalion were conducting Operation River Street, they had an unseen system of support along the banks of the Tigris River.

During the March 26 mission, snipers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, were providing overwatch.

"Our job was to provide security in the inner cordon area from the main service route to the shoreline (of the Tigris)," said Sgt. Derrick Mead, a sniper team leader. "After



Specialist Joel Hughes, a 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, sniper team shooter, takes aim at a target during a live-fire training mission near Tikrit, Iraq.

that, we pushed out and established an observation point to watch Company A, (2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment) move onto the islands."

The operation consisted of 2-7 Infantry clearing islands in the Tigris of anti-Iraqi forces and possible weapons caches.

The snipers' main mission was to provide overwatch for any boats or people who would pose an immediate threat to the Soldiers conducting the mission, said Staff Sgt. Andrew Smith, sniper section leader.

Once the snipers arrive with the rest of the Soldiers to a point that has established security, they leave the main body of Soldiers and find their own positions, Smith said. Since they are responsible for picking the best points of observation, they are on their own once they depart from the main observation post.

"We choose where we are best suited once we get on the ground," Smith said. "The Scouts give us a vicinity in which to work in and we pick our own positions."

Snipers go out in three-man teams, Smith said. The team consists of a shooter, a spotter, which is the team leader, and a third person acting as rear security.

"The spotter is always the senior person on the team," said Pfc. Raul Castro, a 2-7 Infantry sniper team shooter. "The team leader gives me the windage and elevation of a shot, so all I have to do is pretty much pull the trigger."

To any human, including the Soldiers they protect, the snipers are invisible with the camouflage they wear, Mead said. While this protects them from human eyes, there are other challenges they face when on a mission.

"Our biggest problem now is wild animals and dogs," Mead said. "They act as an early warning system. The dogs sniff around and are able to detect us where humans can't. Even if they don't come right up to us, they know we are in the area."



Specialist Richard Coppin, a 2nd Battalion rifleman, counts seized AK-47s found in a cache during an island raid in support of Operation River Street March 26.

Operation River street was much like any other patrol the Soldiers had been on, said Sgt. Gary Heidrich, a team leader with 2-7 Infantry. The only difference was the environment in which they worked.

"We basically just walk the island," Heidrich said. "Depending on where we want to come in, we spread out in a (tactical wedge formation) and clear the whole island. We ran into some pretty thick brush and had to skirt around it, and the mud out here gets pretty deep, but other than that it's gone pretty good."

The Soldiers faced a few challenges on an amphibious assault, as they are accustomed to ground operations.

"Operation River Street was a boat mission," Coston said. "We are a mechanized infantry with tanks and (Bradley fighting vehicles.) Even I, as a lightfighter, have done very few operations using boats."

Spc. Matthew Shorey, a 2-7 Infantry rifleman said, "It was a new thing to many of us, because as infantry we don't ever get on boats. We are a pretty versatile force, so this wasn't a big deal."

Although the mission was difficult, Coston said he felt it went well.

"It was a challenge for us, but the mission went off with no problems," Coston said. "No one fell out of the boats, but we did have a couple of boats run aground. They hit the bottom of the river and had to be recovered. The mission went great though."

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Task Force Soldiers respond to sniper fire

Story, photos by Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE McHENRY, Iraq- No matter how much preparation goes into planning a mission, units must be able to adapt to an ever-changing situation and still complete the mission.

Montana National Guard Soldiers from 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech), assigned to Task Force Liberty, demonstrated their ability to adjust under fire March 25 in Iraq.

Soldiers were operating a listening post in Al Hawija and recording a mosque broadcast message when a sniper from a nearby building attacked.

"We were standing behind a wall preparing to record a live mosque message when the shot was fired at us from about 200 meters away," said Sgt. Sean Brannan, infantryman and team leader. "The shot was just a bit too low, hitting the top of a small courtyard wall, spraying us with bits of rocks and concrete."

The shot resulted in a rapid response by the patrol, firing at the sniper's hideout -- an abandoned building.

Brannan said they knew where the shooter fired from because



Specialist Jeremy Bosch (left) and Staff Sgt. Rick Haerter, platoon leader, both infantrymen, Company B, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.), examine an artillery round found several meters off a frequently traveled road in Kirkuk, Iraq.

of the way the shot came in and threw the debris. They immediately returned fire with a .50 caliber machine gun and small arms while other trucks maneuvered around the building.

The unit quickly cordoned off the building. The Soldiers searched the structure room by room until they secured the area. Although they acted fast, the sniper managed to evade capture.

The Soldiers carefully inspected the suspected firing position, a room on the corner of the second floor, to look for spent shell casings or blood trail, but found nothing.

"There are three other ways out of this building besides the side facing our trucks," said Staff Sgt. Rick Haerter, platoon leader. "He fired one shot which left him enough time to get away from us before we engaged him."

During the search of the suspected building, with the help of Iraqi army soldiers staffing a nearby traffic control point, other Soldiers searched surrounding neighborhoods asking for information on the shooter.

"As usual, no one heard the sniper shot, but heard the 'rip' of the '50' returning fire," said Spc. Jeremy Bosch, infantryman.

Brannan said the building has been the suspected origin of previous shots fired during similar missions.



Staff Sgt. Eric Leistiko, infantryman, Company B, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.), Montana National Guard, provides security while Soldiers from his unit search the town of Al Hawija, Iraq.



Staff Sgt. Rick Haerter, infantryman, Company B, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.), displays what is believed to be the core of an armor-piercing round that was fired at the 1st platoon Soldiers.

After the search was over, two hours and 15 minutes later, the unit recorded the mosque message, although it would have normally finished already if it had started at its normal time.

“By the time we were wrapping up the search the mosque message started playing over the loud speakers a few hours late,” Brannan said.

“There was a lot of firing; we opened up with (a lot of weapons)

so it may have had something to do with the delay (of the broadcasting) of the message. I know they heard it, we were only one block from the mosque when we opened up.”

Brannan said in the past there have been problems with mosques broadcasting messages of violence against the Soldiers, and as a preventive measure, the Coalition Forces record and translate the messages.

After the unit finished the recording, the patrol moved out of the town and moved back to its original position to examine the round impact.

“We found what we believe to be the core of an armor-piercing round; the round we think was fired at us,” said Brannan.

The round allegedly struck the top of wall surrounding a house and ricocheted into the front yard of that house. The bullet then struck the driveway gate with enough force to close it.

“Besides the fact they’re trying to kill us,” said Brannan, “there are two kids that live in that house. Anything could have happened if they were out this morning.”

After the morning mission’s “close call,” the Soldiers moved into an Iraqi village several kilometers away and distributed candy, stuffed animals and a soccer ball. The Soldiers also donated school supplies to the school’s headmaster.

“We were pretty wound up this morning,” said Spc. Jeremy Bishop, infantryman. “But after seeing how poor those people were and how much they appreciated the candy and teddy bears we handed out, it made me feel good about the things we do here (in Iraq).”



Infantryman from Company B, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.), and Soldiers from the Iraqi army search the streets and buildings of Al Hawija, Iraq, after receiving sniper fire.

Troops assault terrorists by air

**Story, photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter K.
Towse**

**42nd Infantry Division
Public Affairs**

AL MUKHISA, Iraq -- Soldiers, by the hundreds, surround the town of Al Mukhisa and move closer, tightening their grip on the terrorist forces living there. One by one, helicopters land and armored vehicles move in during the largest air assault mission since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

"Our intent was to capture insurgents that have been operating in this area," said Lt. Col. Roger Cloutier, battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "We are here to prevent them from becoming a coherent, organized force."

Children in tattered clothes and dirt on their faces line the streets as Bradley fighting vehicles rumble through the town. A little girl, no more than five years old, stands barefoot in the dirt as attack helicopters patrol the skies, the pink bow in her hair faded and torn.

"Elements from my battalion and the 205th Iraqi army Battalion led the air assault," Cloutier said. "The ground assault was led by 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, and a scout platoon from the 205th Iraqi army Battalion. We also had close air support from the Air Force."

Coalition Forces and Iraqi army soldiers con-



A Soldier from 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, takes up security in the city of Al Mukhisa, during the largest air assault operation by 3rd BCT since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

duct searches of houses looking for illegal weapons, explosives, anti-Coalition propaganda and any information that will lead them to the insurgents. As they walk from door to door, they pass out candy and smile at the children.

Cloutier came with a clear message: help us, or help the terrorists. A large group of local townspeople gathered to hear what he had to say.

"We are here to build you schools, we are here to build you hospitals and we are here to make sure your water is clean," Cloutier said holding out his hand. "We cannot do these things if you continue to harbor terrorists."

As he spoke, Bradley fighting vehicles rolled past the group. A U.S. Air Force F-15 fighter jet did a fly-by of the area and all sound is drowned out from the jet engine roaring past.

"I will leave this town if you do not tell us where they are hiding," Cloutier said as he talked with them for several minutes trying to get them to cooperate. "You give me no choice." As he turned to leave, there was fear and doubt on the faces of the crowd.

"The local population appears reticent in cities that have a lot of insurgent activity,"

Cloutier said. "They are afraid because if they are seen talking with Coalition Forces, they, or their families, will be targeted by terrorists after we leave."

Soldiers started to pull back and walk toward the edge of town, continuing to pass out pamphlets and handshakes as the children smiled and waved.

An Iraqi civilian steps forward with information about terrorists. He is quiet and nervous, but compelled by the freedom Coalition Forces are providing.

"We came here expecting to fight," Cloutier said. "Anti-Iraqi forces chose not to do that today and there

was cooperation today from the local population. Many suspected insurgents were detained. Four of the 44 that we detained were on our high-valued individuals list."

As the Coalition Forces prepared to leave, the Iraqi army continued to search houses and check identification cards. There is a calm in the air as the Iraqi civilians and the Iraqi army politely talk and cooperate with each other, taking steps toward a free Iraq.

"My Soldiers and the Iraqi army did phenomenally today," Cloutier said. "They were motivated, disciplined and well-trained."

Hugs and handshakes are exchanged as the Iraqi army takes over the mission.

"This has been a particularly challenging mission," said Col. Steven Salazar, 3rd Brigade Combat Team commander. "Our intent was to come in and disrupt the operations of the anti-Iraqi forces. It is clear by this successful joint operation, that we have done this.

"Third Brigade works with the Iraqi army every day," he added. "As we conduct more and more operations in the future, they will continue to get better. The 205th Iraqi army Battalion is the most proficient in Iraq."

Cloutier stated that he plans on coming back to this town to sit down and discuss future projects with the leaders of the town and the townspeople.

"The Iraqi people have spoken and they have chosen their government," Cloutier said. "I would tell the terrorists that it is time to come in from the cold. Fight your battles with ballots, not bullets."



Soldiers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, set up security near the city of Al Mukhisa.

Iraq powers up new generator

Story, photo by Sgt. Blake Kent

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KIRKUK, Iraq – The “Mother of All Generators” will soon add to the power grid of Iraq, bringing more stability to electrical service.

Soldiers and airmen aided in moving the 282,000 kilogram generator more than 1,000 kilometers from the Jordanian border to a power station outside Kirkuk, Iraq.

When the generator is installed it will increase the electrical output of the power station by 10 percent.

Bringing the V-91 generator, or more affectionately known as the MOAG, into Iraq is the culmination of two years of planning and preparations.

Soldiers from Company B, 162nd Engineers, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry, provided security and route clearance for the stretch of road between Quiarra, Iraq, and the power station, which took three days to travel.

“We are going more than 100 miles at only about six miles-an-hour,” said Sgt. Crichampoo Thepnimit of Vista, Calif., California Army National Guard, attached to Co. B, 162nd Engineers, Idaho National Guard.

The route had mostly straight roads, but moving the generator over bridges and other parts of the terrain proved to be a little more difficult, requiring months of preplanning for the team to overcome.

The generator movement coordinators, the Abnormal Load Engineers, a British company based out of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, made several trips to Iraq to survey a sufficient route.

The final route, which was decided on in November 2004, was surveyed five times to ensure that it would be sufficient for moving the weight.

“It has been a nightmare moving this – we’ve had to bypass both the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers,” said James Roberts, convoy commander of the ALE team. “Every time we surveyed the route, it would change due to the insurgent activities.”

The team had to not only worry about possible ambushes and improvised explosive devices directly attacking the generator and the convoy, but also had to worry about possible damage to the route that had occurred due to IED attacks.

“IEDs have changed the route’s integrity, constantly bringing us new challenges,” Roberts said.

Depending on the road conditions, the generator is only able to move between five and 18 kilometers an hour. All checkpoints and road obstructions had to be removed from the route as well, to ensure that the generator could pass safely.


“Our job as engineers is to open up the road for the generator,” said Sgt. Mario A. Cuellar of Lynwood, Calif., California Army National Guard, attached to Company B, 162nd Engineers, Idaho National Guard. “We brought a bulldozer and a forklift to clear the road. Our other role is as security for the generator.”

The convoy had to be constantly prepared for an ambush or IED attack, especially with the slow speed the group had to travel, Cuellar said.

“I don’t think it is as dangerous as it was before, especially with the amount of security we have on this convoy,” Cuellar said. “We have other units ahead of us looking for IEDs too, so as long as they do a good job, we should be okay.”

The generator had already been attacked on the first stretch of the convoy from Jordan to Quiarra.

The generator was scheduled to reach its final destination on April 3rd, barring any complications.



Background photo: The V-91 generator, or more affectionately known as the Mother of All Generators, is taken in a tactical convoy across central Iraq to a power plant outside of Kirkuk, Iraq. It has taken two years of planning in order to bring the generator through the country.

Soldiers suspicious vehicle at new traffic control point

Story, photo by Sgt. Blake Kent
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AL HAWIJA, Iraq – National Guard Soldiers operating in the area around Al Hawija apprehended five suspects at a traffic control point March 20.

The Soldiers of 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Brigade, 163rd Infantry (Mechanized), Montana National Guard, had just established a TCP on a road entering the town, when they stopped a suspicious vehicle whose driver was carrying \$6,500.

“That is the most American money I’ve ever seen anyone carrying around here,” said Staff Sgt. Peter Akey of Billings, Mont. “It just raises a lot of questions that these guys aren’t answering.”

The driver claimed to be a contractor who was going to change his American dollars for Iraqi dinar, but the Soldiers also received conflicting stories from the man when questioned about a cell phone he was carrying.

The driver and four other passengers from the vehicle were detained and taken to Forward Operating Base McHenry for questioning.

The TCPs are established to randomly

inspect the people and vehicles going in and out of the Al Hawija area. The Soldiers ask the occupants for their identification cards, which they are supposed to carry on them at all times, and then search the vehicle for anti-Iraqi materials, such as propaganda pamphlets, weapons, and items used for setting up improvised explosive devices and mortar attacks.

During the TCP operations, the Soldiers also take the time to hand out toys to children in the vehicles, hoping to show the children that the Soldiers are there to help them and not hurt them, Akey said.

The Soldiers also conduct TCPs with the Iraqi army and Iraqi police, which helps to train the Iraqi security forces how to operate and adds to the effectiveness of the TCPs.

“The IA and IP know the people better than we do,” said Sgt. Russell Herbert of Missoula, Mont. “They have a different perspective and pick up on some things that we don’t, like seeing papers with something written in Arabic, they know if it is something incriminating or not.”



Private Jeromy Lusk of Billings, Mont., Company C, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.), searches a detainee before he is questioned.



Company C Soldiers, Staff Sgt. Peter Akey and Spc. Trenton Kessler of Billings, Mont., and Spc. Beau Stewart of Thompson Falls, Mont., search a car at a traffic control point set up outside of Al Hawija, Iraq.



Soldiers of the 205th Battalion, Iraqi Army, search a room with the owner of a house in Baqubah, Iraq, April 14.

Tiger Battalion leads raid

**Story, photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter K. Towse**
42nd Infantry Division Public Affairs

BAQUBAH, Iraq -- Soldiers of the 205th Battalion, Iraqi army, also known as the Tiger Battalion, led Operation Sergeant Thea'a — named after the most recent Iraqi soldier killed in action.

The purpose of this mission is to capture or kill terrorists in the city of Baqubah.

"I am sure this mission will be a success," said Pvt. Waleed Sattar Jabar, of the 205th Battalion, Iraqi army. "It will be a success because the Iraqi army is always successful."

A handful of officers from 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, working as a military transition team, listen closely to the briefing of the mission.

"A MiTT is an embedded concept," said Capt. Michael Whitney, the commander of Company A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "We link up with our Iraqi counterparts and offer mentorship, advice and training. We go on missions together and we help each other during and after the mission."

"What we are trying to do here is transi-

tion," said Lt. Col. Roger Cloutier, the battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment. "We want the Iraqi army out front. We want to help the Iraqi people help themselves."

"We have been preparing for this mission for a few weeks," said Col. Dhia Ismael Abid Al Tamimi, the battalion commander. "My soldiers planned the mission, will do the mission and will fight if they have to."

Iraqi army vehicles converge on the streets of the city as more than 150 Iraqi soldiers cordon off a section and start the search. Walking house to house, they quietly search each room for any information that would lead them to capturing anti-Iraqi forces.

"They are doing remarkably well," said Staff Sgt. Lloyd Pegues, an instructor at the Iraqi army academy. "They knock, greet the man of the house and respectfully check the house. If they find something, they take the proper measures to collect or detain what they find. If they do not find anything, they hand out pamphlets and leave."

The people of Baqubah greet them with smiles and welcome them into their homes, offering tea and bread to the soldiers.

"We believe in the Iraqi army and think that what they are doing is a good thing," said a 30-year resident of Baqubah. "We have [a lot of] confidence in them."

During the operation, six people were detained for questionable actions and missing identification cards.

"The Iraqi army did very [well] today," said Capt. Wahab Ali Abid Altememy, an officer in the 205th Battalion, Iraqi Army. "The Iraqi civilians cooperated with us and they gave us information about the bad guys."

Each street was blocked from any traffic as foot soldiers and yellow pickup trucks with machine guns provided security.

"My job, as an Iraqi officer, is to provide security to the Iraqi civilians," Al Tamimi said. "The Iraqi army and the Iraqi civilians worked together today and that makes for a good situation."

Coalition Forces continued to remain in the background of the operation, giving advice when needed and making sure the operation was a success.

"They are doing excellent today," Whitney said. "The 205th is the best that I have seen since I have been in country . . ."

Soldiers work to improve medical capabilities in Iraq

Story, photo by Sgt. Blake Kent
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SUDARA, Iraq – For Soldiers devoting time to medical assistance visits in Iraq, there is a larger goal than the temporary aid and medications they distribute. Like the developing Iraqi military and developing government, the Iraqi medical care system must be developed to aid the people long after the Coalition Forces have gone.

The Soldiers of the 163rd Infantry (Mechanized), Montana Army National Guard, are aiding village medical clinic development through evaluations of the clinic's medical needs.

"The visits are a bit of a 'Catch-22' because we want the Iraqi system to work," said 1st Lt. Patrick B. McCabe of Nampa, Idaho, a doctor for the 145th Support Battalion, Idaho National Guard, attached to the 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mech.). "Our main goal is to evaluate what the Iraqi doctors and Iraqi clinics need."

"No country will work if the healthcare system doesn't work," McCabe said.

"A lot of the clinics don't have the tools they need," McCabe said. "If we could help them start treating diseases earlier, we could really save the healthcare system a lot of money and improve the quality of life here."

By visiting the clinics and seeing the patients that are being treated, the Soldiers not only can assess what medicines and medical equipment the clinics need, but can also gain a picture of the major medical problems that the villages are facing.

"You worry about a lot of outbreaks of things like cholera," McCabe said. "In the U.S. that would be just an inconvenience, but here it would be a death sentence."

"It's hard because a lot of the problems we could fix in the states with no problem will kill some of the patients we see in these clinics because they have progressed so far," said Maj. John DuBose of Farmville, N.C., a doctor for the 218th Brigade Combat Team, South Carolina National Guard, attached to 1st Bn., 163rd Inf. (Mech.).

"It is like medieval Europe right now," he said.

Another large problem is gastro-intestinal ailments due to the people getting their water straight from the river, McCabe said.

"What we need to be seeing are wells and water purification measures being taken. A lot of that has to do with the power situation; that would solve a lot of the ailments," McCabe said of the problems with water purification and electricity in Iraq.

Many of the villagers have problems with asthma and other re-



Specialist Charles Nichols of Billings, Mont., and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 163 Infantry (Mech.), listens to a man's breathing while on a medical assistance visit to Sudara, Iraq.

spiratory problems.

Some of the respiratory problems are heredity and air quality in at least this part of the country is very poor, McCabe said.

The medical assistance team also works with the doctors to see what things they need in order to improve the quality of care they can give.

The medical personnel are relatively well trained, but the hardest part for them is staying current, McCabe said. They miss out on the seminars and medical journals that are available to doctors in other countries.

"They are used to using injections for everything," McCabe said. "It is like old American medicine practices."

It is difficult for the village medical clinics to receive the medications they need.

The clinics are supposed to receive supplies every 30 days, but the supplies only last about 15 days according to the clinic doctors.

All of the medical supplies that the medical assistance visit team brings to the clinics are donated from people and organizations in the United States. The team is not allowed to use the military medical supplies at the clinics, so they are dependent on donations.

The medical assistance available to the villages extends outside of the clinics. Patients

needing medical assistance that the clinics can't provide have other options through Iraq's Ministry of Health.

"The unit that was here before us did very few medical assistance visits. Does it help? I guess we'll have to wait and see," McCabe said. "We've only been here a short while, but we have already been seeing the medical institutions improve."

"We've only been here a short while, but we have already been seeing the medical institution improve."

1st Lt. Patrick B. McCabe
doctor
145th Support Battalion



Soldiers from Company C, 1st Brigade, 163 Infantry (Mech.), Montana National Guard, search a house for a suspect in Al Hawija, Iraq.

Infantry Soldiers conduct raid, door to door search

Story, photo by Sgt. Blake Kent
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AL HAWIJA, Iraq – Montana Army National Guard Soldiers operating in the area around Al Hawija, conducted a raid for terrorist suspects with the help of Iraqi army soldiers, March 20.

Soldiers from 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry (Mechanized), raided a home near Al Hawija for a suspect.

The suspect could not be found near his residence so the Soldiers conducted a “soft search” of the area around the village in hopes of finding the culprit.

A “soft search” is where the Soldiers go door-to-door checking identification cards of the people in the village as well as a quick search of all the buildings for the suspect.

“We try to find out more information about the suspect from the villagers and possibly find him in another house,” said Sgt. Russell Herbert, an infantryman from Missoula, Mont., 1 Plt., C Co., 1st Bn., 163 Inf. (Mech.).

The Iraqi army soldiers aided in the soft search operations.

“This was the first time I’ve worked with them in a raid,” Herbert said. “We have been working with them and training with them, so they are ready for these type operations.”

The IA presence aids the Soldiers in aspects of the mission that are typically difficult due to the communication barrier, Herbert said.

“It helps that the IA soldiers are along on these operations because they know the Iraqi people better than we do and pick up on some things that we don’t,” Herbert said.

The IA soldiers train with the Soldiers of the 163rd in preparation for combat missions as well as traffic control point operations, which the IA soldiers now conduct on their own.

“We train them in battle drills on the base and are helping to develop their leadership and discipline,” Herbert said.

Raid operations consist of several elements. The Soldiers coordinate with air support and depend on accurate intelligence and reconnaissance of the area for the raid, as well as coordinated movements of their teams and constant communication.

Though the soldiers missed their target on this raid, they seemed confident that their persistence would succeed in the end.

Troops give school books

by Spc. Adam Phelps
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GABE, Iraq – Task Force Liberty Soldiers visited a poverty-stricken school district to give away school supplies to the children and take note of anything the school may need April 11 in Kan’an.

Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, handed out backpacks to let the school children know that they are here to help and want to gain their trust.

“The unit prior to us started this program and got funding for it through civil affairs,” said Capt. Bart Ransone, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment commander, from Manhattan, Kan. “The money finally came through and we got a contractor to provide the backpacks.

“The funding was more than expected so we purchased 90 watches to give to the kids also.”

The kids are usually positive when Soldiers come around, Ransone said.

“When we’re out and about we try to give the kids candy or toys; they get excited about that,” said Ransone. “On community relations missions we try to give the kids something to brighten their day.”

Ransone said that everytime he goes into a poverty-stricken school he wants to help out even more.

“Each of my platoon leaders has two schools they sponsor and they are developing projects to get blackboards, desks, paint, glass for windows, running water or containers for water; anything they can to make the schools better,” Ransone said. “My platoon leaders are taking this challenge and enjoying it. It’s spreading the wealth to make these kids better.”

There are plenty of schools that have new paint, new plaster and look really good, said Ransone.

“The schools that have the leaking roofs, no windows, a couple of desks and the blackboards are 15 years overdue,” he said. “Those are the schools we’re targeting. We want to get those schools up to a certain level and then start bringing them all up to a higher standard.”

The Iraqi people appreciate it when Coalition Forces come in and help to improve their schools.

“U.S. forces came and fixed our schools and Coalition Forces have supported the school to make it better for the children,” said Sahad Abe Alkarine, school teacher.

“The future of Iraq is in the children, they have a huge roll in Iraq,” said Ransone. “The people now are learning how democracy works. The kids growing up are the ones that will have democracy figured out and they are going to run this country. Making them a priority is a step in the right direction.”

Borderline

Coalition, Iraqi forces patrol infiltration routes from Iran

Story, photos
by Sgt. Matthew Acosta
 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE CALDWELL, Iraq- Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Iranian civilians have been illegally crossing into Iraq.

The border crossing along well-hidden trade routes is used to visit holy lands, trade goods on the black market and by insurgents to enter and leave the country undetected.

This illegal "invasion" of people can be hazardous to the security of Iraq, Coalition Forces and to the safety of the civilians entering the country due to hidden dangers.

"Many of the people coming through here don't know the dangers they are facing," said Sgt. Phillip Montgomery, machine gunner, 1st Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "They come through here to sell products, like whiskey, on the black market. Some people make the trip to see holy sites that were off limits to them when Saddam was still in power."

"This border where Iraq and Iran meet is an extremely dangerous place for anybody," said Tennessee National Guardsman Capt. James Hite, Company A commander. "Since the war between Iraq and Iran ended, there have been thousands of land mines and other ordnance just abandoned here; scattered all over the cliffs, ravines and along river beds."

The area is littered with unmarked mine fields left over from occupying border forces years ago, Hite said.

He added that these trade routes have been used by foreign and domestic insurgents for a

source of explosives for IEDs, transportation over the border and hiding from Coalition Forces and the Iraqi border patrol.

"The terrain is so rough here, not many vehicles can pass through. There are tight paths running between sheer cliffs, winding for miles," Montgomery said. "This area can easily conceal people transporting goods and weapons."

He added that they work closely with the Iraqi border patrol. Because of the vast unforgiving terrain and limited human resources, the border patrol cannot cover the entire area.

"Besides lack of manpower, part of the problem is there are no definitive borders," Hite said. "There are many maps with differences in the locations of the borders which also add to the already difficult situation."

Hite said they have not come across any people crossing the border while on patrol yet, but they have found many caches of stockpiled weapons which are usually destroyed in place.

Some of the intelligence about stockpiled weapons comes from area reconnaissance missions from other units and other times the locals lead the Soldiers to the locations.

"Many times villagers would lead us right to piles of munitions for us to destroy because trying to give directions in that terrain is just asking for trouble," Hite said.

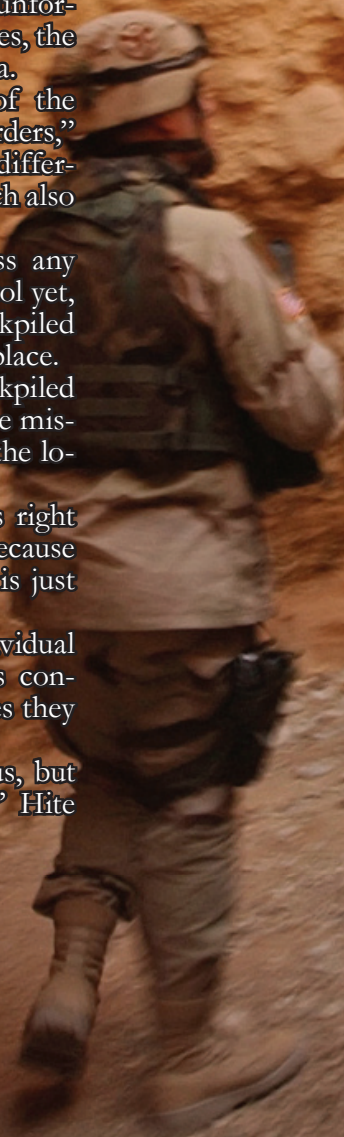
They can spend days picking up individual munitions, said Hite, but their focus is concentrating on destroying the larger caches they find.

"We have quite a big job ahead of us, but that's OK, we have the time to do it," Hite said.



Specialist Franklyn Watts, Task Force Liberty, guards patrol through a village.

Background photo: First Lt. Richard Tackett, platoon leader, 1st Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, searches a crevass pathway illegally used as a trade route for black market goods and for insurgents hiding weapons.





gunner, 1st Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team, stands guard while his fellow Soldiers conducted a foot



Sergeant 1st Class Joel Gibbons, cavalry scout platoon sergeant, 1st Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, stands guard while an Iraqi child passes information of a weapons cache found near the Iranian border to the commander of the unit, Capt James Hite.



Sergeant 1st Class Joel Gibbons, cavalry scout platoon sergeant, 1st Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, inspects damaged ordnance on a cliff ledge near the Iranian border, in Iraq. Tons of ordnance was abandoned after the war with Iran and has been a source of explosives for bomb-making insurgents.

Guardians that never sleep

Story, photos by Staff Sgt. Peter K. Towse
42nd Infantry Division Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GABE, Iraq -- There are no walls here, just some patched razor wire on mounds of dirt and sand. There are no attack helicopters patrolling the sky, just a few lonely guard shacks atop cement towers ... no elaborate fortifications, just tents and a small number of battle-ridden buildings.

But Forward Operating Base Gabe has a secret; a very loud secret.

Metal behemoths, machines of formed steel, called Paladins, are the walls of this base and draw the line in the sand — seemingly beckoning to terrorist forces to cross it.

Soldiers of Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, stand ready and resolved to protect the FOB and guard other forward operating bases as well.

“Our mission is threefold,” said Capt. Joshua A. Snyder, commander of Headquarters, Headquarter Battery and a native of Carlyle, Pa. “We provide [fire] support for missions outside the FOB and provide counter-fire against insurgent mortar and rocket attacks. We also provide [fire] support for Forward Operating Bases Warhorse and Scunion and the Iraq cities of Baqubah and Balad.”

Weighing 31 tons, the 155mm Paladin stands motionless waiting for the command to release the fury held within it — enough fire power to level a small city.

“This is the main artillery piece of the Army ... it is the ‘Cadillac’ of guns,” said Staff Sgt. Hefence C. Lubrin, a native of Pembroke Pines, Fla., and fifth section gun chief. “We have to make sure that if anyone goes out the gate (of the FOB), we have to be ready to support them.”

In the early hours of April 7, they get their chance — terrorists launched a mortar round just north of Baqubah, in the hopes of hitting Forward Operating Base Warhorse, not knowing that six miles away, the crew of the Paladin wait in the last shadows of dawn.

The radio in Gun Five comes alive. “Fire mission comin’ down!” said Staff Sgt. Vincent Anderson, the fire direction control noncommissioned officer in charge from Fort Pierce, Fla. Within seconds coordinates flash across the

automatic fire control system. In unison, Lubrin and his crew yell “Fire mission!”

Lubrin’s crew jumps to action and they flow over the controls with the harmony of an orchestra to bring the Paladin to life.

The driver of the Paladin and a native of Fort Worth, Texas, Pfc. Thomas P. Johnson, jumps in the driver’s hatch and revs the engine to 1000 rpm as Lubrin turns on the hydraulics and raises the tube. Pfc. Luke F. Connelly, No. 1 man for fifth section from Wautoma, Wis., prepares the

100-pound projectile for placement into the tube.

“Permission to ram”, Connelly said to the chief. Lubrin confirms the round and gave the command to ram. Connelly rammed the round into the tube and stepped back as the gunner, Spc. Christopher L. McCall, a native of Mobile, Ala., cut the gun powder, verified the cut and charge with the chief and placed it into the tube and yelled “I see red!” letting everyone know that the powder is in correctly and the breach is ready to close. Lubrin gave the command to close the breach.

“Gun laid on target,” Lubrin said. “Permission to prime and hook up,” Connelly said and Lubrin gave the okay to prime the cannon and hook up the lanyard. Eleven seconds have passed as Lubrin, with his hand raised in the air, awaits the final approval to unleash the deadly weapon.

He received the order and brings his arm down, yelling “Number 5 FIRE!”

The silence of the morning is broken as the Paladin fired. Smoke and fire filled the air as the ground trembled with terrifying power. The cannon rocked as the tube slammed back and the breach opened.

Inside the smoke-filled gun, the crew is ready with another round and, within seconds, another round goes down range. Then another is fired. Four rounds in all are fired toward the enemy.

As the smoke clears, the sun breaks the horizon. The crew heard mission complete called over the radio and the chief ordered them to stand down. The crew gave a sigh of relief as the tube is moved back into place and the goliath waits again.

“We come in, we occupy, we fire,” Lubrin said. “It is that simple.”



A 155mm Paladin howitzer with 1st Battery, 10th Field Artillery, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, stands ready for a fire mission at Forward Operating Base Gabe April 16.



A 155mm Paladin howitzer with 1st Battery, 10th Field Artillery, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, provides artillery support for Coalition Forces in the area.

Never Forget

‘Loyal, trustworthy’ Soldier mourned

Story and photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DAGGER, Tikrit, Iraq - A Soldier's life was taken from the 1st Brigade Combat Team at Forward Operating Base Dagger when a terrorist fired a rocket at the base, April 15.

Corporal Aleina Ramirez, a military policewoman and a member of 1st Brigade Combat Team, Brigade Troops Battalion personal security detachment, Task Force Liberty, was killed during the attack.

Soldiers who knew and worked directly with Ramirez have very fond memories of her personality and character.

"I met her in Kuwait, and we hit it off really fast because we had a lot in common," said Pvt. Megan Zeigler, a 1st BCT BTB information systems operator analyst. "When I think of her, I always want to think of loyalty right away. She was a very loyal and trustworthy person. When you were around her, anything that was wrong, she would uplift you. She was always happy."

"We were the only two female (M249 Squad Automatic Weapon) gunners on this FOB. She faced danger every day. She never complained. She would go out and sit on top of the vehicle and be vulnerable. She would have done anything for anybody. She was the strongest Soldier I think I had ever met. She makes me want to be strong and brave."

Ramirez inspired the Soldiers around her by being the best she could be.

"The thing I admired about her most was the fact that she could never complain about anything she had to get done," Pfc. Nia Rock, a 1st BCT BTB supply specialist. "As a Soldier, if she was told something on short notice, if she had been up all night and just hitting the bed, no matter when it was, she was always prepared. She could never be late even if she wanted to, that was not an option."

"The littlest things made her happy, even eating something of her choice that day would make her smile. When I asked her about being on the PSD team and wanted to know if she wanted to stay on it, her reply was 'if my team stays, I want to stay.'"

A memorial ceremony was held for Ramirez April 21. Ramirez is survived by her father Wilfredo, her mother Aleina, and her brother Joel.



Ramirez studies for a promotion board.

Correction

Our April 2005 issue included the story of a medical assistance visit near Forward Operating Base McHenry. The unit that led the visit were the medics of the 1st Battalion, 163rd Armor. Soldiers of the 145th Support Battalion assisted in the mission.

The Soldiers serving in the Multinational Division North Central, Iraq are an important part of the Task Force Liberty team.

We will always remember
our fallen heroes.

Staff Sgt. Todd D. Olson
1st Bn., 128th Inf. Reg.
Samarra, Iraq
Dec. 27

Spc. Jacob Palmatier
1st Bn., 30th Inf. Regt.
Qaryat, Iraq
Feb. 24

Sgt. 1st Class Mark C. Warren
3rd Bn., 116th Armor
FOB Warrior, Iraq
Jan. 31

Spc. Adriana Salem
3rd Forward Support Bn.
FOB Remagen, Iraq
March 4

Staff Sgt. Steven Bayow
2nd Bn., 7th Inf. Regt.
Bayji, Iraq
Feb. 4

Sgt. Paul W. Thomason III
2nd Sqd., 278th Cav.
Kirkuk, Iraq
March 20

Sgt. Daniel Torres
2nd Bn., 7th Inf., Regt.
Bayji, Iraq
Feb. 4

Sgt. 1st Class Robbie D. McNary
1st Bn., 163rd Armor
Hawijah, Iraq
March 31

Sgt. Rene Knox, Jr.
5th Bn., 7th Cav. Regt.
Balad, Iraq
Feb. 7

Sgt. 1st Class Stephen C. Kennedy
1st Sqd., 278th Cav.
Balad Ruz, Iraq
April 4

Sgt. Chad Lake
5th Bn., 7th Cav. Regt.
Balad, Iraq
Feb. 7

Staff Sgt. Kevin D. Davis
Co. G, 82nd Cav.
Hawijah, Iraq
April 8

Spc. Dakotah Gooding
5th Bn., 7th Cav. Regt.
Balad, Iraq
Feb. 7

Cpl. Aleina Ramirezgonzalez
3rd BTB, 1st BCT
Tikrit, Iraq
April 15

Sgt. 1st Class David Sallie
2nd Bn., 69th Armor
Baqubah, Iraq
Feb. 14

Pfc. Steven F. Sirko
1st Bn., 30th Inf. Regt.
Muqadiyah, Iraq
April 17

Pfc. David J. Brangman
3rd Bn., 69th Armor
Patrol Base Uvanni, Iraq
Feb. 13

Spc. David L. Rice
1st Battery, 7th FA
Muqadiyah, Iraq
April 26

Spc. Justin B. Carter
1st Bn., 15th Inf. Regt.
FOB McKenzie, Iraq
Feb. 16

Sgt. Timothy C. Kiser
116th Engineers
Hawija, Iraq
April 28

Sergeant Joshua Dumont, engineer, 386th Combat Engineer Battalion, Task Force Liberty, mans his M2 .50 cal. machine gun after leaving Forward Operating Base Caldwell, Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. Matthew Acosta/22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

